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THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 1960

Forgotten Gap

Senator Symington says the "administration" has been doing tricks with intelligence information in an attempt to deceive the American people as to the seriousness of the "missile gap." The Missouri Senator, a presidential hopeful, also says he realizes that his accusations might "be labeled as politically motivated by those who prefer to conceal the facts, and by others who do not know the facts."

It is not our purpose to accuse Senator Symington of playing politics with this grave question. Nor do we pretend to know all the facts concerning the accuracy of this country's intelligence estimates. If we may be permitted one comment, however, it is that we wish Senator Symington had named names and had cited hard facts to support his charge that "the intelligence books have been juggled so the budget books may be balanced." There is a certain glibness to this—and also, in the absence of supporting evidence, a certain recklessness.

If the Senator was referring to current intelligence estimates, and the methods by which they are made, a statement made the night before by Allen Dulles, director of Central Intelligence, is worthy of note. Mr. Dulles said: "I can assure you that in preparing them (intelligence estimates) we look to nothing but the available facts, disregarding all outside considerations, political, budgetary or other. . . . Facts have no politics. We are diligently seeking the facts without fear or favor."

Judging from the text of the Symington statement, however, his principal complaint is that instead of relying on estimates of Soviet ability to produce missiles, as was the case a year ago, we are now taking into account their intention to produce. We see nothing wrong with this. But Senator Symington says that through this process "the administration has given the people the impression that the missile deterrent gap has been sharply reduced and possibly eliminated."

This brings to mind another and almost forgotten gap—the bomber gap, about which so much was being heard three or four years ago. Intelligence estimates, based on Soviet capability, indicated that the Russians might surpass us in production of long-range bombers. Senator Symington, and others, were greatly worried. But no one is worrying about this today. In fact, most people concede that we are much superior in long-range bomber strength.

What happened to the prospective bomber gap? Simply this. It failed to materialize because the Russians, for reasons of their own, did not produce the bombers they were capable of producing. Our intelligence people discovered this, and the early estimates of Soviet bomber capability were revised downward to conform to Soviet intent—to what our information indicated they actually were producing.

There is no assurance, of course, that the same thing will hold true of Russian missile production. But if current intelligence indicates that the Russians have not built missiles up to the limit of the capability estimates of a year ago, it seems to us that this is a legitimate factor to take into account. It does not mean that the "administration" is dealing from the bottom of the deck, and it does not justify the accusation that "the intelligence books have been juggled so the budget books may be balanced."